

especially within Europe, has resurfaced over the last few years to the extent that an Inspector in the Metropolitan Vice Squad recently said that it is fast becoming more profitable and less risky than drug trafficking. The dramatic recent growth of HIV/Aids as a gender issue in sub-Saharan Africa, where 60% of the people infected are women, is partly attributable to a cultural tradition where women cannot say no. As Peter Piot, head of UNAIDS, said at that organisation's annual conference: 'The face of Aids is becoming the face of young women'. The fight must go on.

Like all biographies there are some sections that are more interesting than others. Nonetheless I would strongly recommend this book as both an enjoyable read and a fascinating delve into the more murky and less well-known areas of Victorian Britain.

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'Not So Much A Question of Greatness'

Sheila Gooddie: *Mary Gladstone: A Gentle Rebel* (John Wiley & Sons, 2003)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

The dustjacket describes Mary Gladstone as 'a woman at the heart of politics nearly half a century before women had the vote', silently carrying the implication that, without the vote, Victorian women had no place in politics. This was never true but we are only gradually rediscovering what that place was, and it is good to see a commercial publisher finding space for a biography of a woman whose importance relates principally to her family's political position.

For some women, their place in Victorian politics was, as might be expected, merely decorative, the little bit of colour seated quietly among the black frock coats on the platform. For others, such as Josephine Butler, it was campaigning in the front line on unpopular women's issues. Among the aristocracy, it was often participation in the family business – the hostess who used entertainment as part of political man-management like

Lady Palmerston – or the covert messenger such as Mrs O'Shea intriguing on behalf of her lover Charles Stewart Parnell. Political women were, naturally, faithful confidantes of their menfolk and a trusted few were left to manage local campaigns in the absence of their husband or brother who was down in Westminster. But were there other more operational roles open to the right woman?

The Gladstones were a recently rich family, but the money earned in trade by Mary Gladstone's grandfather, Sir John, was invested in political opportunities and a place for the family among the ruling elite. Sir John himself played a prominent part in the politics of Liverpool as a friend and supporter of Canning and Huskisson. Mary's paternal uncles stood for parliament, as did her brothers. Her father, W. E. Gladstone, forced to abandon his clerical vocation, was of course the 'People's William', the dominant Liberal politician

of the Victorian era who, by the time Mary was born in 1847, had already achieved cabinet office. Like it or not, Mary was destined to a life surrounded by politics at the highest level.

There were three main thoughts with which I approached this book. Naturally it would contain the history of the dutiful daughter in a privileged Victorian family. I also looked forward to the insight into female political activism promised on the dustjacket and hoped in addition for a few side-lights on the life and career of the Grand Old Man.

Sheila Gooddie gives the impression of being most comfortable with the family life. The introduction, setting the scene from the Great Exhibition onwards, and the first chapter with Mary listening devotedly to her father's Midlothian speeches, might be skipped by the impatient reader with some knowledge of the era, but when the book gets going we get full details of family life among the elite. I almost wrote 'typical family life' but, while Mary's upbringing was conventional, it would be hard to assert that the Gladstone family was typical. Mary's father was an extraordinary mixture of political endeavour, literary tastes, religious controversy and a physical energy whose surplus expended itself in long walks and tree felling. He had proposed to her mother Catherine Glynne in a letter containing a (just about grammatically correct) sentence of 141 words in eighteen clauses and sub-clauses.¹ Catherine was both very different from and well suited to her husband. Graceful but full of fun, forgetful, impulsive and unpunctual, she achieved an independent life with the charities she promoted and yet was fully her husband's confidante, supportive of his ambitions. They married in a joint ceremony with Catherine's younger sister Mary who married George, Lord Lyttelton. The Lyttletons had twelve children

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and the two families remained close, with the cousins regularly in each other's company and among Mary's closest friends. The Gladstones occupied a variety of houses in London to suit his career but stayed in Catherine's family home of Hawarden Castle to such an extent that, while they did not own it, Hawarden Castle became organised around them.

'Von Moltke'

Mary was the fifth of eight children. By the time she was three, she had already suffered the loss of an elder sister and the family worried about her health, particularly her eyesight. Both for her good and for the recuperation of her parents, it was decided that they would take a holiday in Italy. Perhaps this was Mary's biggest contribution to British politics, for it was on this holiday that Gladstone visited political prisoners in jail in Naples and his indignation, expressed in a public letter to his mentor Lord Aberdeen, helped pave the way for his eventual entry into the Liberal government of 1859.

In the shorter term, his period out of office in the mid-1850s allowed him to be an indulgent father to his family. In sharp contrast to, say, the Chamberlain family, the Gladstone children were both allowed to argue with and contradict their parents. Unlike her brothers, Mary did not go to school but was well read, drawing on the family library for works as varied as Shelley's poetry and Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, and showed a passionate interest in art and music. In 1865 she was presented at court but one gains an impression that she preferred the time she spent in the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons to the time spent at the balls and entertainments by which young women of the time met suitable marriage partners. While Mary appears to have made friends readily, few young men measured up to the standard set by

her father and the one who did, Arthur Balfour professed himself in love with her cousin, May Lyttelton, who died in 1875. Others paid suit to Mary, including Tennyson's son Hallam, but she took a long time to recover from the shock of Balfour's rejection. By way of sublimation she built friendships with the much older and married Burne-Jones, Ruskin and Lord Acton.

Whether it was the high standards set by their parents or whether it was parental selfishness which required the family to stay at home as unpaid secretaries, none of the Gladstone children married young. Helen, the youngest sister, did not marry at all but escaped the family home, with Mary's assistance in overcoming the strong objections of their mother, to become a pioneer female academic at Newnham College, Cambridge. Ordinarily, organisation of the household would have been Catherine Gladstone's duty but it was one to which she was ill-suited by either temperament or inclination and the role devolved gradually on to Mary. Mary's superior administrative skills earned her the nickname 'von Moltke', after the Prussian field marshal responsible for the German success in the Franco-Prussian War.

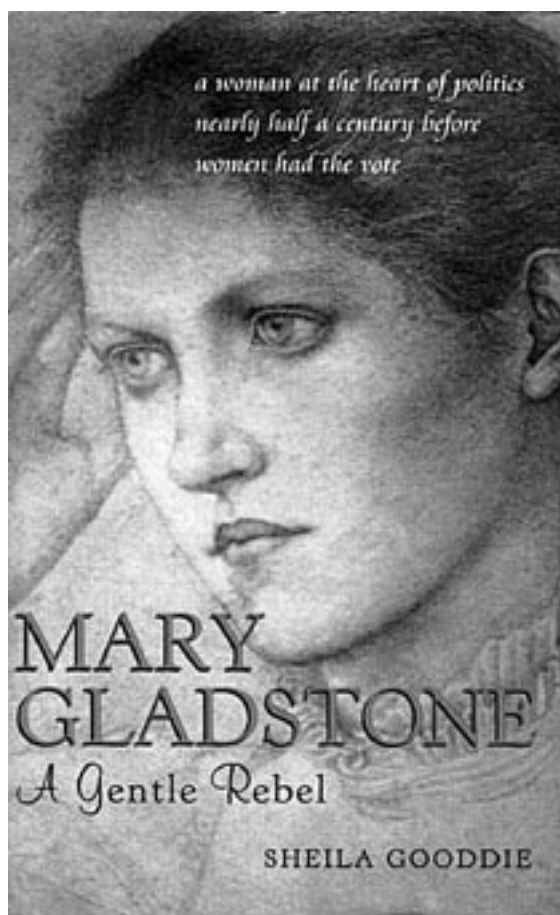
After his defeat in the 1874 election, Gladstone gave up the leadership of the Liberal Party but did not retire from politics, making a gradual comeback to the front line, particularly after the agitation over the Bulgarian atrocities of 1876. On his 'retirement', he decided not to employ a secretary and relied on his children to undertake the role. While this would have been seen as good training for sons destined to a life in politics, the involvement of the daughters and especially of Mary was much more unusual.

Her own office

In 1880, W. E. Gladstone was elected for both Leeds and Mid-

Lothian and ceded the Leeds seat in favour of his son Herbert. This created a vacancy in the official secretarial team that supported Gladstone when he assumed the premiership for the second time – a vacancy filled by Mary. Mary created her own office space in 10 Downing Street and worked as part of a team of five. Since she was the only woman on the team, this caused concern to Mrs Gladstone about the propriety of her unchaperoned meetings. Gooddie quotes Sir Henry Ponsonby as estimating that Gladstone and his secretaries wrote about 25,000 letters a year.

Here, where Gooddie could have located the heart of her book, we are hindered by her apparent inexperience in political history. Colleagues clearly saw Mary as having the ear of her father. She had the man-management skills her parents neglected in their focus on higher things, soothing bruised egos and placating irate ministers. She served as a channel to Gladstone for Rosebery and Acton in particular.



Principally, she acted for her father in ecclesiastical appointments – a subject in which he probably took more interest than any other premier and in which she was able to rely on the assistance of her friendship with Henry Scott Holland.

In many ways, Gladstone's government of 1880–85 was the most frustrating of his periods as Prime Minister – its achievements modest compared to the scale of its majority. Gladstone's colleagues regularly threatened to resign and Gladstone himself was apparently always on the verge of retirement. To what extent did Mary's diplomatic skills prevent matters deteriorating even further? Sheila Gooddie apparently does not ask herself what difference Mary made; for her the achievement of a female working at No. 10 is enough in itself, and we are left with little clear impression of Mary's impact 'at the heart of politics'. Rather she focuses on the passage of the well-known events of the second government and on the passing comments of Mary on these events or, more naturally, on the devastating impact on the family of the assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish, the husband of her close friend Lucy Lyttelton.

In 1886, at the age of 39, Mary surprised the family by

marrying a man nine years her junior, Harry Drew, the curate at the parish church of Hawarden. She married as she always intended: for love rather than position. The shock over the age difference and relative poverty of her husband appeared to horrify her cousins and her maid more than her parents, for whom a clergyman had much to recommend as a suitor. The wedding, in February 1886, was fitted in around the Home Rule crisis and, although initially she remained with the family, the chance of Harry running the parish of Buckley allowed the creation of a separate household, albeit one only a few miles from Hawarden. Unfortunately this was at the expense of Helen's career, as she left Cambridge to take over the care of her parents.

Despite her age and a number of miscarriages, Mary was blessed with a daughter. Harry Drew remained at Buckley until 1905 and then became rector of Hawarden where he died in 1910. Mary survived until New Year's Day in 1928 and in her last few years contributed articles to *Nineteenth Century* on her father's library, published her reminiscences of Acton and wrote a biography of her mother.

One is used to Victorian biographies, whoever their

One gains an impression that she preferred the time she spent in the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons to the time spent at balls and entertainments.

subject, being defined in relation to Gladstone, and it is pleasantly surprising to find that this one is not. With the Grand Old Man shooed off into his 'Temple of Peace' the rest of the family suddenly come to life. The glimpses thus granted are not always comfortable. The inconveniences portrayed range from the minor, such as the degree of organisation required for travel in Victorian Europe, to the always present risk of premature death, even among such well-cosseted families, in childhood and childbirth.

Mary Gladstone wrote of her planned biography of her mother, 'it was not so much a question of greatness as of unusualness, distinctiveness' that were needed for a biography. As Sheila Gooddie concludes, this is as true of Mary as of Catherine. The Mary portrayed in this biography was obviously bright, perceptive and passionate in her politics. It would have been nice to have heard from her more directly than Sheila Gooddie allows.

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- 1 P. Magnus, *Gladstone* (John Murray, 1954), p. 38. The letter is quoted in Magnus.

catalogued. They are stored in some 400 boxes and include correspondence, MS notes, memoranda and reports, committee papers, speech transcripts, news cuttings, publications, campaign material, photographs, cartoons, video and cassette recordings. These cover David Owen's political career from his early Labour Party membership until his resignation from the House of Commons in 1992. The main body of records date from c.1962–92, although the collection also contains some earlier material relating to David Owen's family life and education.

The papers are arranged in four groups, broadly reflecting

ARCHIVES

The David Owen Papers at Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library

by **Maureen Watry**

In July 1996 the Rt Hon the Lord Owen CH was installed as the Chancellor of the University of Liverpool. At that time

his papers were transferred to the University Library.

Over a period of two years the papers were sorted and